

Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site Report of Formative Evaluation

Review of Task:

Communication Arts Company (Commarts) conducted formative evaluation at Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site Visitor Center in Hodgenville, Kentucky, and Old Kentucky Home Middle School in Bardstown Kentucky, November 4-5, 2004. The purpose of the study was to test mockup exhibits with visitors, students, and teachers to obtain feedback on the presentation and content of seven planned exhibit topics.

Feedback was obtained from the general visitor population using face-to-face interviews at the Visitor Center. Face-to-face interviews with teachers and two focus groups of students were conducted at the school.

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Survey Justification:

The evaluation objectives were to:

- Assess visitors', teachers', and students' overall impression of the exhibit mockups;
- Determine the effectiveness of the proposed exhibits in capturing the attention of visitors;
- Determine the success of the proposed exhibits in communicating the main ideas;
- Understand the positive and negative reactions that visitors have to the proposed exhibits;
- Determine the visitors' preferences for certain interpretation methods;
- Determine the proposed exhibits' effectiveness for coordinating with the Kentucky Department of Education's 5th and 8th grade social studies core content objectives.

Respondent Universe:

The respondent universe of the general public was all visitors to Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site Visitor Center during the evaluation period.

The respondent universe of teachers and students was those who agreed to participate in the school-based testing of the mockup exhibits.

Sampling Procedures:

- Individual visitors and small visitor groups were randomly selected and approached as they entered the Visitor Center lobby. They were approached, greeted, and told the purpose of the evaluation activity and asked to help. Those who agreed were asked to view the mockups of the new exhibits and to respond to questions about the exhibits afterward using Instrument A (attached). They were told about the Privacy Act and Paperwork Reduction Act and offered contact information (attached). No one asked for additional information. Individuals and one representative of each group were also interviewed using Instrument B (attached) to obtain demographic and visitation experience data. Data collection occurred from 11 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. until 4:15 p.m. on November 4 and from 2:30 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. on November 5. Although it was expected that a tape recorder would be used to record answers, visitation patterns made the use of the tape recorder impractical. A log was kept (attached) noting general contact information, including information about refusals.
- Area teachers of 5th and 8th grade social studies comprised the second target audience. The 5th and 8th grade levels were chosen because these are the grades in which

Kentucky history and American history to Reconstruction, respectively, are taught and tested. The principal of Old Kentucky Home Middle School in Bardstown was contacted and agreed to allow 5th and 8th grade teachers and students to participate. Two teachers from each grade reviewed the exhibit concepts (in hard copy and video projection) and spent approximately one hour reviewing the exhibits and participating in face-to-face interviews using Instrument C1 and 2 (attached). Teachers were also given summaries of the Kentucky Department of Education Social Studies Core Content information for reference (attached). A tape recorder had been proposed to be used but was not practical because all the teachers met as a group.

- Eight students from both the 5th and 8th grades comprised the third target audience. Students were selected by teachers and asked to participate, and parental permission was obtained. Each student group took approximately one hour to review the exhibit concepts in hard copy and video. They participated in focus group discussions and wrote comments on the focus group questionnaire forms, Instrument D (attached).

Expected Response Rate/Confidence Levels:

- Of the general public, 50 people were expected to be encountered, with 80 percent or a total of 40 agreeing to participate over two days. In fact, 78 persons were encountered, 20 refused, and a total of 58 participated, a response rate of 74 percent. It should be noted that of the 20 who refused, 14 said they would have been interviewed had they had more time. Most of those were visitors at the end of the day.
- Of four teachers and 16 students expected to be encountered and interviewed, it was expected that 100 percent would participate. In fact, all four teachers and all 16 students agreed and participated, a 100 percent response rate.

All interviews were qualitative in nature and not intended to be generalized to the wider audience. Instead, findings will provide the exhibit design team with guidance on issues informing the design process.

Dealing with Potential Non-Response Bias:

Observation of the general public not participating in the interviews provided demographic characteristics of some non-respondents (e. g., gender, size of group, presence or absence of children with group. This was recorded by the investigators and compared with respondent demographic data obtained from the participants.

Those who refused to participate included 10 males, eight females, and two children. The size of the groups who refused to participate included two groups of one; seven groups of two and one group of three. Five of the groups who refused to participate were encountered after 3:30 in the afternoon, which affected the amount of time they had left to spend in the Visitor Center and the Memorial Building. Those who elected not to participate all expressed time constraints or said that they were “just passing through” or on their way to another appointment.

General Public Evaluation Summary:

Dates: November 4-5, 2003

Visitation in Visitor Center: 148 on day 1; 58 on day 2; total of 206

Hours of contact: 4 on day 1; 2 on day 2; total of 6

Visitors observed in 6 hours: 64 on day 1; 30 on day 2; total of 94

Encounters for interviews: 53 on day 1; 25 on day 2; total of 78

Refusals: 10 on day 1; 10 on day 2; total of 20

Interviews conducted: 43 on day 1; 15 on day 2; total of 58 (22 separate groups)

Response rate: 74 percent

Demographic Information:

1. First time visitors: 46 Repeat visitors: 12
2. Place of residence: Kentucky, 23; Texas, 6; Tennessee, 6; Indiana 5; Louisiana, 4; California, 3; Michigan, 2; New York, 2; Ohio, 2; West Virginia, 1; Mexico, 2; Puerto Rico, 2 (Two Canadian visitors came late and did not have time to do the interview but wanted presence to be noted.)
3. Type of visit: all personal (one adult doing GED study, one mother with two children doing home school assignments)
4. Type of groups: all family or alone
5. Number in group: 1, 3 ; 2, 12; 3, 3; 4, 2; 6, 1; 8, 1
6. Knowledge about Lincoln: High 6; Medium 14; Low 4 (split answers)
7. Highest educational level of group: doctorate 2; master's degree 2; college plus 1; college degree 8; some college 7; high school 1
8. Special interest in history: yes 14; children yes 2; average 2; no 1; no response 3
9. Similar visits: yearly 4; 1-2 times a year 3; 3-4 times a year 4; more often than yearly 6; several times a year 1; no response 1; less often than yearly 1; 30-40 times a year 1; just did 20 national parks 1

10. Time spent in exhibits: less than one hour 3; one hour 3; 1-2 hours 5; 2 hours 3; 3-4 hours 1; it depends 4 (1 1/2 hours here); no response 3
11. Gender: Male 26; Female 32
12. Age range: children 11; teens 6; 20s 0; 30s 7; 40s 5; 50s 8; 60s+ 10; no response 1

Answers to Questionnaire/Interview:

Similar comments are quantified by the number of times the idea was repeated.
or general comments about liking everything or disliking nothing were not documented here.

1. Purpose: education; life of Lincoln; better understanding of Lincoln's formative years; inform about Lincoln; show all he overcame to be President; look at Lincoln's milestones; to honor Lincoln; deification and misrepresentation of an evil man; enlightenment; tribute to Lincoln
2. General communication: life of Lincoln; heritage of family/family life; importance of the man; awareness of U. S. history; early life; Lincoln's influence in history and contributions to our country; Lincoln's achievements; Lincoln was a real person; Lincoln's early life and beliefs; children can learn a lot here; he was a great man; important facts about his origins; from humble beginnings someone can rise to greatness
3. Interesting content: grandparents and parents/genealogy/family tree 6; Boundary Oak 4; use of quotations 3; video 2; early life; formal education limited: self-taught; didn't know family was from Virginia; life chronology; new display format; where Lincoln lived as a child; Lincoln's contributions to the country; harshness of the land; household artifacts; ideas about how he was self-deprecating; future cabin interior; slavery connections; use of photographs
4. Attractive and appealing: large picture of Lincoln in lobby/front lobby display 3; Boundary Oak 3; genealogy/family tree 2; all interactive exhibit plans; maps and pictures; Memorial Cabin and Bible are well preserved; Memorial Cabin; future log cabin and open window; quotations; planned model of his childhood home; farm and tools; layout of the farm; long blue wall and the fact that it does not have much text; use of large type; film
5. Weaknesses: Video: poor quality of images; information too general; objection to 23rd Psalm; no information about Lincoln or the area or the life and times of Lincoln; movie needs pictures of Lincoln in different periods of his life; movie old, out-of-date. Exhibits: green blob/topographic map 3; birth diorama; genealogy hard to understand; children may find there is too much text; tools not well identified
6. Not liked: wants more comparative information for frame of reference; no mention of

the 600,000 men and boys he killed in order to create an all powerful central government; want more about what shaped his ideas; tools not explained; more context for artifacts; singing in film

7: Suggestions: more to touch/more hands on/ interactive 3; more detail on adult life 2; lighting/exhibits need to be brighter 2; more perspective on farm, how large it was compared to something understandable from today's reality; put life in chronological order; exhibits could contain more information; use short, to the point sentences; more about assassination and John Wilkes Booth; use more color; make sure cabin replica depicts how the actual cabin would have looked (dirt floor); keep text to a minimum; more actual things Lincoln owned; more pictures; more drawings depicting the time of Lincoln; use actors or re-enactors; tell more about his life after time at birthplace; more about his early life and education; more about slavery; more on family history; movie could be longer; too much red in the movie; new movie should have Ken Burns documentary feel; add trolley or way to help elderly and handicapped see Memorial Building, springs, and grounds; open the path

8. Questions: more about boyhood, what everyday life was like; how big is an acre; more on Lincoln's writings and teachings; more about Lincoln's wife; Lincoln's wife and kids; why did he move around so much; what about his adult life; were any of his ancestors Quakers; where is Lincoln buried; what were the tools used for; was Nancy illiterate or not

9. New ideas: didn't realize he was religious 2; the hard life he had; self taught and went on to become an attorney; he was a simple and modest man; simple life; he was not just a legend but real; Lincoln's simple genius; he was truly a great man; Lincoln spent a lot of time in this area; how Lincoln's mother died; marriage bond; ancestry; family life about mother and father; his grandfather was named Abraham

10. Surprises: none; how Nancy Hanks died; there was no walking tour; no trolley or golf cart to see grounds; Lincoln's modesty; Lincoln had grandchildren; thought he moved from Kentucky to Illinois

Comment Book:

A comment book was placed in the lobby for anyone to use. It captured the following comments:

- I think the wall would be a great idea because it shows better graphics. It also would be easier to understand Lincoln's life from his birth to his death.
- I could not spend a lot of time, but I think the folks working on the project will have the best input and I'll agree. Thank you.

- Make sure you let us non-U.S. people know right at the beginning why he was so important.

Text Evaluation:

Two variations of one text panel were shown. Visitors were split 50/50 on whether they liked the Ekharv style or the more traditional style of text presentation. The Ekharv appears longer because lines are shorter and thus the text column is longer. Those who chose the more traditional layout did so because they thought it was shorter and read more like a book. Those who chose Ekharv thought it looked more attractive and was more poetic and artistic. They also found it easier to read because thoughts were kept together.

Observations About Study:

Although visitors were asked to evaluate only the mockups for the new exhibits, their comments occasionally reflected how they felt about the entire experience. Generally, their comments were very positive and enthusiastic about the proposed . People seemed happy to be asked to participate. Many did not make suggestions or find anything weak. Most watched the video before they looked at the mockups. Most of the negative comments were about the video. Almost all the weaknesses they noted will be addressed by the new exhibits. They understood the purpose and what the exhibits were trying to communicate. The first day of the evaluation was a holiday for many visitors (Election Day), including some area schools, and the weather was beautiful. There were several family groups, including 14 children and youth observed. The first day total visitation was 2.5 times more than the second. The second day was rainy, and school was back in session. There were only 4 children among those observed on the second day.

Topics To Be Addressed by Exhibit Design:

- Although there was no mockup of the cabin interior to evaluate, several visitors were glad to learn that it was planned. This will be an opportunity to explain the reproductions in context and more about everyday life of pioneer families, something visitors wanted to know more about.
- Interactive aspects of cabin interior, Lincoln logs, and Boundary Oak will help satisfy visitors' requests for more hands-on activities.
- Exhibit text will be displayed in an engaging, reader-friendly style.
- Genealogy diagram will be enhanced.
- Lighting will be improved in new exhibits.

- Tools will be interpreted.
- Some comparative frames of reference will be used, as appropriate.
- Other Lincoln sites will be referenced in the Memorialization display.
- More details about Lincoln's adult life may be given in Memorialization display.

Teacher and Student Evaluation Summary

Date: November 5, 2003

Location: Old Kentucky Home Middle School

219 E. Muir Avenue

Bardstown, Kentucky 40004

Principal: Rip Collins

Teacher Participants:

Peter Fleenor 8th grade Civics

Steve Quesenberry 5th grade Geography

Berry C. Alcorn 8th grade U. S. History

Sheila Keeling 5th grade Social Studies

Length of teaching ranged from first year to 25 years.

Teachers' Answers to General Exhibit Questions:

1. How will exhibits engage students

touch screens will help; Lincoln logs are a good idea 2; use of technology will engage students; all good ideas

2. Reading level

seems appropriate; should be a lower reading level (third grade); okay for middle school; reading level is good if teachers could have teacher packets with vocabulary lists

3. How well exhibits relate Lincoln's early childhood to adult life

very much so; timeline approach is good for organizing information for students

4. Maps and charts

be clear on instructions; they seem easy for students to understand; use of color will help

5. Purpose

show how a simple boy changed American history; to make participants feel involved or close to experiencing life as it was at time of Lincoln's birth

6. Other comments

Make connections to other Lincoln sites; exhibits greatly broaden perspective on Lincoln's life and impact; good to have pre-trip activities for students beforehand;

might be nice to show his tomb; enlarge the Visitor Center; see Russell Freedman's Lincoln: A Photobiography: children like the series of photos that show how Lincoln aged in a short time

Teachers' Answers to Questions About Social Studies Core Content:

1. What do you teach about Lincoln

discussion of Presidents and amendments; nothing in Geography now; but ideas for future use; study the five great accomplishments (Legacy); focus largely on Civil War; students give an oral report on Lincoln's life; Presidents; issues leading to the Civil War

2. How will you use these exhibit ideas

students can use them to research a President; can use geography showing how the family moved southwestward; visuals will help students; text can be used as shorter narrative for students with reading comprehension; 5th graders will relate to the exhibits because they are about someone close to their age; students would appreciate the boyhood more than the adult years

3. How will you use exhibits to address academic expectations

history, government, culture; lifestyles of the period; need pre-trip activities and learning, telling students what to look for

4. How do exhibits connect to five essential strands

the civics connection is not as strong but it gives background for when we discuss the Presidents; historical perspective, government, civics; good bridge for Kentucky and U. S. History; helps personalize the subject matter; good to include all of Lincoln's life since many from this area will not go to Illinois or Washington, D. C. exhibits

5. How can these relations be improved

have some hands-on activities and more visuals; more hands-on for elementary students

6. How can exhibits enhance the site as a field trip destination

very good for Kentucky history; be direct and to the point for groups with limited time

Teachers' Text Evaluation:

one chose Ekharv style text: it is different

three chose traditional style text: more appealing; looks shorter and thus will appeal to students more

Topics Teachers Mentioned To Be Addressed by Exhibit Design:

1. Consider illustrations showing how Lincoln aged.

2. Suggest pre-visit teacher packet for middle schools.

3. Try to include more hand-on activities and interpretation about every day life in cabin interior.
4. Improve instructions and directions for maps and genealogy chart.
5. Some suggestions may be addressed in new video or Memorialization kiosk to be developed later.

5th Grade Student Participants:

8 5th graders, 4 male, 4 female

5th Grade Students' Answers to Questions:

1. What did you like best and why
interactive, fun; pictures, made it come to life; learning about his family
2. What did you like least and why
reading, words too hard; family tree hard to understand
3. Surprises
he came from a blended family; his mother died when he was only 9; his family life after his mother died; moved from Kentucky at age 7 and lived in Indiana until 21
4. What is the first thing you think of when you hear Lincoln
he freed the slaves; his parents had land in Kentucky; pioneer life; tools, utensils used by people in Lincoln's time; President; assassination
5. What about Lincoln's life is most like your own
step-mother
6. What about Lincoln's schooling is like or different from yours
didn't go to school
7. What else would you like to know
did he have any pets; did he have a raccoon; were his parents divorced; more about his brothers and sisters; did they use furs and skins; what happened to the guy who shot him; games from their time; more about the assassination; why didn't Lincoln die right away; why did the Indians kill his grandfather; would like to see some old buildings and furniture and see more interactive; did he get along with his step brother and sisters; who did he marry; did he have children
8. What needs explaining better
didn't understand some words: *legacy*, *immortalized*; use some simpler words: didn't know meaning of *unancestried*, *unprivileged*, *shaped him*; didn't know meaning of *emancipator*; didn't understand genealogy chart
9. Other comments

use headsets for nonreaders

5th Graders' Text Evaluation:

All liked traditional style best. It seemed shorter.

8th Grade Student Participants:

8 8th graders, 4 male, 4 female

8th Grade Students' Answers to Questions:

1. What did you like best and why

they will keep peoples' attention; hands-on activities because they keep students' interested 5; Boundary Oak hands-on 3; it showed how he lived his life compared to ours; the widespread categories of his life's accomplishments

2. What did you like least and why

Not enough information about his family; too much reading for kids' attention span; the family tree did not have good directions; want to know more about schooling

3. Surprises

how he did so much work when he was so little; that he only lived in Kentucky until he was 7; he got to go to school; that his mom died when he was young; how much his family traveled during his life; that Larue and Hardin counties used to be the same; the house (cabin) might not be the actual house he was born in

4. What is the first thing you think of when you hear Lincoln

President 4; slavery; the years of the 1800s; Gettysburg Address; assassination; President during the Civil War; top hat; beard

5. What about Lincoln's life is most like your own

both Kentuckians 2; freed slaves; how he had to help out with his family; worked hard on farm; the fact that he guided the Union to victory shaped the United States today; he was a successful person; he lived in the country

6. What about Lincoln's schooling is like or different from yours

students did not go to school very long 3; alike in that it is impacted by farming; different in that students had to help with farming; he didn't go to school if there was work for him to do at home; one room schoolhouse; they didn't have paper to write on in school and used chalk boards instead; they only went to school during the winter; his school hardly had any books and they were very small (?); they didn't have the knowledge we have today; my school is big and his was small

7. What else would you like to know

more about his school life 2; more about assassination 2; more about John Wilkes Booth; more about when he was about 13 or 14; how he grew up; more about when he was little

8. What needs explaining better

the family tree 2; things that happened to him in Kentucky; his family; his time in office

9. Other comments

Concerned about handicapped access, for mobility, hearing, and vision impaired 3 (one student's brother was deaf); need text to be available in other languages like French, Spanish, German 3

8th Graders' Text Evaluation:

All liked Ekharv style best. It looked more interesting. It looked like poetry.

Topics Students Mentioned To Be Addressed by Exhibit Design:

1. Exhibits can include more about school and everyday life, especially in the cabin.
2. The genealogy chart and its instructions will be improved.
3. ADA issues will be addressed.
4. Consider adding more about assassination.
5. More hands-on experiences will be considered (perhaps in cabin).

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